

COMMUNICATING ABOUT PARCC

A Toolkit for School and District Leadership

Adapted from materials developed for the Teacher Voices Convening in Nashville, September 2013,
organized by the Common Core Communications Collaborative
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1. BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW

The following material is adapted from a Grantmakers for Education guide. You can use it as starting point to explain how the standards and assessments came into existence.

Developed by States, for States

Responding to widespread recognition that U.S. students needed better preparation for college and careers, states in July 2009 banded together to launch the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association, the effort brought together educators and experts — with deep involvement of teacher unions and higher education — to create voluntary new standards for states in English language arts (ELA), literacy, and mathematics. Their aim was to create something entirely new: world-class standards that would be “robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.”

Within a year, 45 states and the District of Columbia — representing 80% of the nation’s K–12 student population — adopted the Common Core standards as their own. For the first time, states would educate American students according to a common set of expectations, benchmarked against those of high-performing countries. By most accounts, including observers with differing political philosophies, the Common Core standards are an especially strong set of learning expectations — voluntarily developed by the states and for the states.

Meanwhile, in 2010, the U.S. Department of Education underwrote two state-led consortia committed to creating online common assessments aligned to the Common Core: the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers \(PARCC\)](#) and the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#).
(More about PARCC in section 2.)

Many experts see the new tests as inseparable from the new standards. Standards-based reform research suggests that standards must be reinforced by rigorous, high-quality tests if they are to be implemented fully. Furthermore, they provide an important opportunity for comparing student knowledge and progress across states.

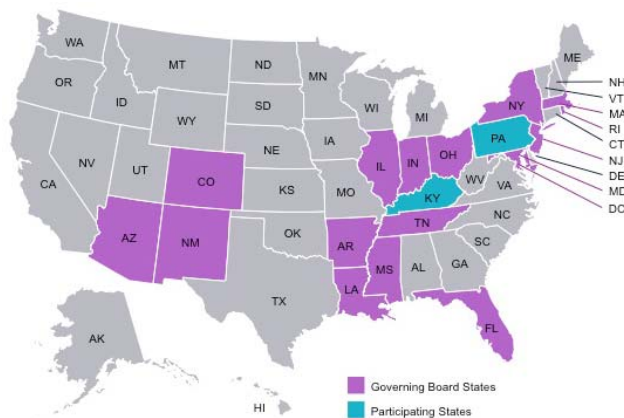
These new assessments aim to be more sophisticated, higher-quality exams that are superior to the off-the-shelf bubble tests that have long frustrated educators, families, and students. They come with a package of teacher-friendly tools, including banks of interim and formative assessment items to help educators monitor and guide student progress. After field testing and refinements, the assessments are expected to be operational in the 2014–15 school year.

2. ABOUT PARCC

The Basics

PARCC is comprised of 19 states that have come together to develop high-quality student assessments linked to the Common Core in ELA/literacy and math. The assessments will be ready for the 2014–15 school year for students in grades 3–11 and will replace the statewide tests in those subjects that students take now.

The computer-based assessments will ask students to answer a variety of types of questions, show their work, and explain their reasoning. The tests will assess critical-thinking and problem-solving skills in an in-depth manner. In math, for example, students will be asked to explain their mathematical reasoning, not just get the answer right. In ELA/literacy, they will be asked to read complex passages and draw evidence from the material to make inferences and present a persuasive argument. And unlike many current state tests, PARCC will assess writing skills at every grade level.



States will field test the new assessments in Spring 2014. The testing windows are:

- Performance-based: March 24- April 11
- End of year: May 5 – June 6

Most schools in RI will participate in the field test at some grade levels. Practice tests will be released at about the time that field testing begins so that students in all grades can get a first-hand opportunity to interact with the PARCC test. There will be paper and online versions.

Multiple Assessments

The PARCC assessment system will include two required assessments:

- a performance-based assessment given after 75% of the school year
- and an end-of-year assessment given after 90% of the school year.

Depending on the state in which you live, the time your students spend taking the new tests could be shorter, somewhat longer, or the same as current state tests. It is important to remember that the new tests are more comprehensive than the outgoing ones.

The assessment system also includes:

- Optional diagnostic assessments in reading, writing, and math that are available throughout the year beginning in the 2015-2016 school year.
- Optional mid-year assessments in ELA/literacy and math.

How PARCC Will Be Different

- Test quality will mirror and reward high-quality coursework.
- Writing will be assessed at every grade rather than just grades 4, 8, and 11.
- Tests will be computer based, interactive, and engaging and will be more efficient than paper-and-pencil tests.
- Tests will measure the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in college and careers and will assess the full range of student performance, not just students in the middle.
- Tests will measure student growth at all levels as well as focus on proficiency.
- Timely data and results will allow aid professional development and allow teachers to tailor instruction to students' needs.
- The tests will include embedded supports for English language learners and students with disabilities.

Useful PARCC Tools

Fact Sheet: www.parcconline.org/parents

Overview PowerPoint: www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCNewVisionofAssessment07-26-13%28NXPowerLite%29_0.pptx

PowerPoint for Teachers: www.parcconline.org/communications-educators

PowerPoint on Costs: www.parcconline.org/assessment-cost-estimates

FAQs: www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCFAQ_7-26-13.pdf

Sample Items and Performance Tasks: www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes

Glossary of Assessment Terms: www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCGlossary7-01-13.pdf

Information about the Field Test: www.parcconline.org/field-test

Also, Achieve has very useful state-specific fact sheets and PPTs: www.achieve.org/states

3. KEY MESSAGES AND TALKING POINTS

You can use the following key messages and talking points in multiple ways: in speeches and presentations, press releases, letters, op-eds, articles, social media, and on the web.

Explain the WHY

When discussing both the new standards and tests, it is essential to remind listeners why your state is working with others on these important reforms. *Customize the following national data to your state.*

Student performance is too low.

- 80% of entering college freshmen are not prepared academically for first-year courses, according to ACT. In RI approximately 75% of students who enter the Community College of RI need remedial classes.
- The United States spends an estimated \$3 billion a year on college remediation, re-teaching content that students should have learned in K–12, according to Complete College America.
- Only 34% of U.S. students are proficient in 4th grade reading and 35% in 8th grade math, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- Performance is much lower for low-income students and students of color.

Current standards are too low.

- A 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute showed that Common Core State Standards are clearer and more rigorous than standards used by 39 states in math and 37 states in reading. In 33 states, the new standards are superior in both math and reading.

Current tests do not measure essential skills.

- Current tests measure current standards; moving to clearer and more rigorous standards requires significant revision of the current tests.
- Few require students to write, explain their reasoning, or show their work.
- A study of graduation exams in six states set out to determine how high a bar the tests set. The results show that these tests tend to measure only 8th, 9th, or 10th grade content, rather than the skills students need to succeed in college and the workplace.¹

The tests provide little value to teachers, students, parents, and postsecondary leaders.

- They fail to deliver honest, timely results that higher education can use for placement decisions.
- No state had 4th grade reading assessments as challenging as the internationally benchmarked National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), according to a 2009 NAEP study. Only one state had an 8th grade test as challenging as the NAEP math test.

Focus on Key Messages

When communicating about these new assessments, it's important to link the test to the new standards and, most important, to better preparing students for college and careers.

¹ Achieve, Inc., *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up? A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams*, 2004.

Package deal. Challenging new standards require next-generation assessments that measure these expectations and provide teachers the information they need to help students succeed. It's a package deal designed to better prepare students for college and careers.

Better tests. These improved tests will give students a chance to apply their learning and show their work — going far beyond multiple-choice, “bubble” tests.

Teacher-friendly. The tests will more accurately reflect great teaching, and teachers will get the results much more quickly — allowing them to further strengthen their instruction.

Supporting Messages

These messages describe additional benefits.

Worthwhile. These are tests worth taking:

- In literacy and math, these tests will measure essential skills such as students' ability to solve real problems rather than just fill in a test bubble.
- In math, students will have to correctly solve the problems — plus explain their answers and show their work.
- They will require writing in every grade, showing whether students can construct an argument/make a case using evidence based on what they've read.

Comparable. Comparable scores across states will allow policymakers and educators to measure their students' performance against students across the country, which is especially important given the high levels of mobility among military families and others.

College- and career-ready. These next-generation tests will be more directly aligned with college and career readiness. Colleges can use them to place students into credit-bearing courses. Employers can use them to determine what additional training is needed, if any.

Engaging. These computer-based tests will be much more engaging for students.

Teacher-developed. Thousands of educators have been involved in reviewing the new test items. Participation already has been an unprecedented professional development opportunity for teachers who have had a chance to collaborate with the peers from multiple districts and states.

Efficient. These assessments offer valuable economies of scale. No state can, on its own, develop robust, high-quality, performance-based tests aligned to the Common Core State Standards at this price.

Customize Your Messages for Each Audience

Talking points for parents

- By having your child solve real-world problems, these tests present a more honest and accurate picture of what your child has learned — much better than any multiple-choice test can do.

- Higher standards and aligned tests will better prepare your child to have **choices** about colleges and careers — and to succeed in life.
- Timely results will allow teachers to strengthen their instruction while there's still time, before your child moves onto another grade and graduates from high school.

Talking points for teachers

- These tests present a more complete and accurate picture of what your students have learned — much better than any multiple-choice test can do.
- Teachers have been involved in every phase of developing these new standards and tests.
- You'll get results in time to be able actually use them with your current students.

Talking points for policymakers

- Higher standards and aligned tests will better prepare students in your state for college, careers and life — and to compete in the 21st century economy.
- These standards and tests were developed *by* states *for* states in a unique collaboration led by 45 states and the District of Columbia.
- Having comparable results across states will allow you to see how well your education system measures up and whether tax dollars are being invested effectively.

Use Examples to Explain the WHAT

The most powerful approach for gaining endorsement of the new standards and assessments is to compare them to the current, more limited standards and tests. Showing is always more persuasive than just telling. If possible, show examples from your own classroom, school, or district. The following offers some national examples. *Customize to your state.*

English Language Arts/Literacy

The Common Core State Standards for English language arts are designed to ensure that students fully understand what they read and can effectively talk and write about it. These are the basic reading comprehension skills needed to succeed in K–12, college, and beyond — regardless of career path.

While the old standards focused on simply expecting students to recite facts learned through reading textbook passages, the new standards expect students to read books and textbook passages that are more challenging than what was previously read in each grade level — including reading more original writings whenever possible, such as President Abraham Lincoln’s “The Gettysburg Address” or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Students are then asked to show a deeper understanding of this material than has previously been required of them, demonstrating greater critical thinking and analytic skills.

For example, questions on the new assessments will call on students to back up their answers with information from the text instead of just offering their opinions.

3rd grade comparison: ELA

ISTEP Writing Prompt:

Read the writing prompt below and complete the writing activity:

- Jump out of bed! Look out the window! It is a perfect weather day!
- Write a story about a day when the weather seemed perfect.

PARCC Writing Prompt:

You have read two texts about famous people in American history who solved a problem by working to make a change.

- Write an article for your school newspaper describing how Eliza and Carver faced challenges to change something in America.
- In your article, be sure to describe in detail why some solutions they tried worked and others did not work.
- Tell how the challenges each one faced were the same and how they were different.

7th grade comparison

ISTEP: Students are asked to read a brief fictional text about “Max” the cat:

Writing Prompt:

- What happens early on that might suggest that “Max” the cat might be involved with the missing bolt? Support your answer with details from the story.

PARCC Analytical Prose Constructed-Response Item:

The student is asked to read the text, “Biography of Amelia Earhart,”

- Based on the information in the text “Biography of Amelia Earhart,”
 - Write an essay that summarizes and explains the challenges Earhart faced throughout her life. Remember to use textual evidence to support your ideas.

PARCC Analytical Prose Constructed-Response Item:

- This item differs from traditional summary prompts that broadly ask for chronological biographical details. **Instead it asks students to focus on a particular aspect of Earhart’s life, requiring student to first select critical evidence from the text and organize that evidence into a summary of her quest to become an aviator.**

Mathematics

In math, students will need to accurately calculate equations, understand concepts not just memorize answers, and accurately select the best mathematical concept or equation to solve real-world problems, while demonstrating why the method or equation they selected is accurate.

The new standards make sure students are learning and absorbing the critical information they need to succeed at higher levels.

Elementary School Math Example	
Previous Math Question	CCSS Math Question
Each shirt costs \$4. How much do 3 shirts cost?	Each shirt has 6 buttons. How many buttons are needed to make 7 shirts?
<i>This question can be answered by a “count-all” strategy, in which you don’t need to know your multiplication tables by memory to get the right answer.</i>	<i>This question requires automatic recall of multiplication tables to get at the right answer.</i>

Middle School Math Example	
Previous Math Question	CCSS Math Question
Donna buys 40 apples at 35 cents each. She eats 2 apples and sells the rest for 45 cents each. How much money does she make?	Donna buys some apples at 35 cents each. She eats 2 apples and sells the rest for 45 cents each. She makes \$4.40. How many apples did she buy?
<i>This question only requires use of simple arithmetic.</i>	<i>This question requires use of an algebraic equation.</i>
<i>This question requires one calculation, using a formula.</i>	<i>This question requires a series of calculations and reasoning. It measures if students understand why the formula works.</i>

High School Math Example	
Previous Math Question	CCSS Math Question
If $3(y-1) = 8$, then what is y ?	What are two different equations with the same solution as $3(y-1) = 8$?
<i>This question is an example of solving equations as a series of mechanical steps.</i>	<i>This question is an example of solving equations as a process of reasoning.</i>

Source: Foundation for Excellence in Education

Additional PARCC Examples: www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes

Explain the WHEN

Educators, in particular, will want to know what to expect when.

Standards timeline

States adopted the standards in 2010 and are in various stages of implementation — developing curriculum frameworks, professional development resources, and the like. *Customize to your state.*

PARCC Timeline

- 2010–11 School Year: Launch and design phase
- 2011–12 School Year: Development begins
- 2012–13 School Year: Item research and tryouts and related research and data collection
- 2013–14 School Year: Field testing and related research and data collection
- 2014–15 School Year: Full operational administration
- Summer 2015: Set achievement levels, including college- and career-ready performance levels
- Fall 2015: Release first set of PARCC results.

A more detailed timeline of key PARCC activities is available at

www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCTimelineforPolicymakers_5-26-13.pdf.

4. ADDRESSING SPECIFIC ISSUES

You can use these talking points as a starting point to help you address hot-button concerns.

Cost

The cost of the PARCC assessment will be about the same cost as the NECAP assessment. f The cheapest type of test is the “bubble test,” which yields very little useful data. Assessments that require problem solving and critical thinking incorporate student writing and, as a result, tend to be more expensive to score. For example, PARCC is saying:

- These tests are much higher quality than current assessments. They are tests worth taking, measuring critical thinking, writing, and the ability to use information to solve real-world problems.
- The cost of \$29.50 per student per year for the PARCC assessment is about the same as the NECAP assessment. It is:
 - ◆ Less than 1% of annual per-pupil spending in Rhode Island; and
 - ◆ About the price of a half a tank of gasoline for a family-size car or “movie night.”

Testing Time

PARCC estimates it will take most students the following time to complete its summative, performance-based tests in math and English language arts (ELA)/literacy. 8 hours annually in 3rd grade;

- Slightly more than 9 hours in grades 4–5;
- Slightly less than 9.5 hours in middle school; and
- Slightly more than 9.5 hours in high school.
- Testing time is approximately 1 percent of the instructional time during the school year
- PARCC assessments will require slightly more testing sessions than the current NECAP testing: 9 PARCC sessions compared with 6 or 8 NECAP sessions, depending on the tested grade. PARCC will assess writing at in grades 3-11 compared with only 3 grade levels with NECAP.

A few overarching points to make about the time issue:

- These are *replacement* summative tests, *not additional* tests.
- The time spent on these tests amounts to less than 1% of students’ total time in school. K–12 spending is one of the top three line items in each state’s budget.
- Spending less than 1% of the K–12 budget to measure the impact of this spending is hardly excessive.

- Plus, this new generation of tests will be an extension of instructional time, embedded into teachers' day-to-day work. To yield useful information, a certain minimum number of items are required. No one involved in the planning and design of these assessments wants these tests to be any longer than minimally required.
- For PARCC states: PARCC will measure writing skills at every grade level, which are not included in some current state assessments. PARCC also will assess critical-thinking and problem-solving skills in an in-depth manner. These kinds of test questions take students more time to answer than fill-in-bubble items.

The Likelihood of Lower Scores

Given that most states' current standards and tests are less rigorous than the next generation of tests, one can expect student test scores to be lower — by as much as 30–40 points in some cases. You need to start explaining this change to parents, educators, and students now. Some talking points follow:

- Lower scores on more challenging tests do not mean that our students are learning less than before. It means that we are finally holding our students to the higher standards they will need to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.
- These scores are a more honest and accurate reflection of what students know and can do. When our graduates encountered the real world of college and jobs, reality set in. Currently, only 25% of American high school graduates are ready for college-level courses. Remedial levels in college (and the debt associated with taking remedial courses) are sky high. Scores of employers are turning down job applicants because they don't have the skills for even entry-level jobs. Thousands of graduates do not qualify for military service.
- It is much better for students if any academic weaknesses can be discovered in 3rd, 5th, or even 10th grade, when teachers still have the resources and time to help them, than after graduation when it's too late.
- Consider borrowing an opening line from former Colorado Gov. Roy Romer, who said the following when announcing the first round of test scores after standards were previously raised: "I'm proud to announce the lowest test scores in the history of the state."

5. EVIDENCE: WHAT POLLING TELLS US

You can use these survey results as a starting point for understanding where support is strong or weak — and for testing messages that will resonate with key audiences. The following section contains information from national polls. Some states have also done state-specific polling. Customize to your state, if possible.

Summary

Most teachers are aware of and have received information about the Common Core and in most cases have started the process of teaching with the new standards. But far fewer parents and members of the general public are aware of/knowledgeable about the Common Core. Teachers believe that implementing the standards will be challenging, although those who have started using the standards are less likely to feel that it has caused/will cause dramatic change in the classroom than those who have not started teaching with the standards. Results are mixed about whether different groups of stakeholders believe the Common Core will improve education in their communities.

Views of standardized testing generally are more negative. However, support increases when asked about assessments that are aligned to the Common Core.

Communications implications of this research

Achieve says the priority is to be more proactive in getting timely, clear and detailed information into the hands of educators and the public:

“It is critical to sustain and even ramp up efforts to educate teachers — including the details of the state’s implementation plan and what teachers can expect in the coming school year and beyond, particularly with regard to professional development, aligned instructional materials, and opportunities for cross-state collaboration. The more educators know about the CCSS, the more supportive they tend to be, both of the new standards and assessments, which is why the state’s implementation plan and communications plan for the CCSS and common assessments must be well aligned and integrated.

“Voters also need to become more aware of the CCSS and what it means for students and parents. What will be different? How will the expectations change? What kind of support will be available for struggling students? Voters, like teachers, also need to understand how these changes fit into the broader reform agenda, why it’s important, and the value of the new standards to our education system

The Winston Group advises:

“While much of the data suggests teacher dissatisfaction with testing, it also shows that they do use the information gained from student assessment and think it can be done effectively. Even

when presented with some drawbacks from new tests (longer testing time, a drop in scores), many teachers say it makes them feel more positively about the assessments. This is quite remarkable and underscores the power of rolling out assessments that truly measure higher-level thinking skills and whether students have the knowledge and skills to succeed.”

Detailed Views on Assessments

Achieve, August 2011 and May 2012

www.achievetest.org/growingawarenessCCSS

Survey administered by Public Opinion Strategies: August 2011 and May 2012

Participants: 800 voters, 160 teachers

- While voters who already had heard about the Common Core State Standards were somewhat mixed in their assessment of them in August 2011 (37% favorable, 34% unfavorable); in May 2012 they held a net favorable opinion (42% favorable, 28% unfavorable) of the standards.
- The more teachers know about the Common Core State Standards, the more positive their impression. Among the 65% of teachers who say they know “a lot” about the standards, 77% favor them, 18% oppose.
- Almost three-quarters of voters (74%) and nearly two-thirds of teachers (64%) support implementing the CCSS assessments.
- Once again, the more teachers know about the Common Core State Standards the more likely they are to favor implementation of the CCSS assessments. For example, 70% of the 65% of teachers who have heard “a lot” about the standards support their implementation, a percentage that drops to 46% of the 13% of teachers who have heard “not much/nothing” about the standards.
- When asked about specific assessment components, voters gave the highest ratings to test results being available in one to two weeks; the first optional test being diagnostic; and administering the same test across states. They gave the lowest ratings to required tests being used for accountability; tests being given throughout the year; and students taking all tests on the computer.
- However, after hearing about the various features of the common assessment system—even those components voters and educators are skeptical about—support actually increased slightly for the implementation of the new assessments, going up to 82% of voters and 66% of teachers (up from 74% and 64% of teachers when only the general description was provided).

**Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research,
June/July 2013**

[www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Parent Attitudes/AP NORC Parents Attitudes on the Quality of Education in the US FINAL 2.pdf](http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Parent%20Attitudes/AP_NORC_Parents_Attitudes_on_the_Quality_of_Education_in_the_US_FINAL_2.pdf)

Survey administered by NORC: June 21–July 22, 2013

Participants: 1,025 parents of children who completed grades K–12 in the last school year

- More than half (61%) of parents think their child takes the appropriate number of standardized tests, while 26% think their child takes too many standardized tests. Only 11% of parents think their child takes too few.
- 75% of parents say that standardized tests measure their child’s performance somewhat well or very well, with only 24% saying they measure performance not too well or not well at all.
- A majority (69%) say that the tests measure the quality of education offered by schools somewhat well or very well, and just 30% say they do so not too well or not well at all.
- 46% of parents think the authority for determining the subject areas covered in standardized tests should fall to the local school districts compared with 29% who favor the state government and 20% who favor the federal government.
- 93% of parents think standardized tests should be used to identify areas where students need extra help. Eighty-three percent think they should be used to ensure that all students meet adequate national standards. Fifty-eight percent think they should be used to determine whether or not students are promoted or can graduate.

AFT Survey of Parents, July 2013

www.aft.org/newspubs/press/2013/072213b.cfm

Survey administered by Hart Research: July 9–14, 2013

Participants: 1,003 public school parents

- 57% of parents say there currently is too much testing in schools, and the same percentage say that testing has taken too much time away from teaching and learning.
- Only 29% say the current amount of testing is right, and 37% say the amount of testing has not taken too much time away from teaching and learning.
- 64% say the state’s standardized tests do not accurately measure student achievement, and only 28% say the tests are an accurate measure of student achievement.
- An equal percentage of parents (32%) cite lack of funding and too much testing as the biggest problems facing schools.

AFT Survey of Teachers, March 2013

www.aft.org/pdfs/press/ppt_ccss-pollresults2013.pdf

Survey administered by Hart Research: March 2013

Participants: 800 union members

- 75% of union members say they approve of states' adopting Common Core standards.
- 74% are very or fairly worried that new assessments will begin before everyone involved fully understands the standards and before instructional practice has been aligned.
- 54% believe that the Common Core will result in more emphasis on testing.

**Foundation for Excellence in Education/Chiefs for Change,
February/March 2013**

<http://chiefsforchange.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Chiefs-for-Change-PreSurvey-Results-Key-Findings-Memo.pdf>

Survey administered by The Winston Group: February 21–March 2, 2013

Participants: 900 K–12 public school teachers (11 states: Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Tennessee)

- Two-thirds (66%) of teachers have an unfavorable view of standardized testing.
- Teachers acknowledge that state standardized tests cover important and useful material (62%) and that the tests affect what they teach in the classroom (76%).
- 82% say they use data from their student's performance on tests to inform how they teach, and 63% say that if they are an effective teacher, students will show growth on test scores.
- Teachers are not convinced that tests are great measures of student learning, with 56% saying their state's standardized tests do not do a good job of measuring whether students have the knowledge and skills they should have at their grade level, and with 58% disagreeing with the statement "without standardized tests, it would be difficult to measure student progress in a fair, objective way."
- When the new assessments are described as "more effectively measuring higher-level thinking skills," 84% of teachers say they feel more supportive of assessments aligned to Common Core.
- Even when told about the additional testing time required with new assessments, 45% of teachers say that fact makes them somewhat more supportive about assessments aligned to Common Core. Half (50%) of the teachers surveyed said the extra testing time makes them less supportive of the new exams.
- Teachers are split on whether they would be more or less supportive of the assessments if implementation meant an initial dramatic decline in scores. Forty-two percent say they would be more supportive of the assessments if they knew the new tests would be more rigorous but would lead to a drop in scores, while 45% said they would be less supportive.
- Currently, 49% of teachers say they have "a lot" or "some" information about the PARCC and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessments, while 49% say they have "not much" or "no" information.

PIE-Net Focus Groups with Teachers and Parents

Conducted by Hothouse Communications

Participants: 12 focus groups of teachers and parents in Denver, Minneapolis, and Miami

Few know about the Common Core, even fewer about the new assessments. For parents, testing is not a problem per se — it's an accepted and expected part of the school experience. The issue for both parents and teachers is how condensed and frequent testing has become. Most believe strongly that much of current testing is not being done to benefit the students.

And the predicted initial drop in scores is a big concern. Although making it palatable will be very tricky, there is grudging acknowledgment that we might need a reset.

Recognizing our education system needs an overhaul

Once we set the bar where it is supposed to be, they will drop but will get on par with everyone else

Easier to accept if it happens to everyone

Detailed Views on Common Core State Standards

PDK/Gallup Poll, August 2013

<http://pdkintl.org/programs-resources/poll/>

Phone survey of 1,001 adults, (+/-3.8%)

- 62 percent said they had never heard of the new standards.
- Of the 38 percent who said they had heard of them, many thought – incorrectly – that the federal government is forcing states to adopt them and that the CCSS covers every academic subject.
- Only 41 percent of those surveyed said they thought the CCSS would make American schools more competitive globally.
- At the same time, 95 percent want schools to teach critical thinking skills, another CCSS goal.
- The poll also found growing skepticism about testing. Only 22 percent said increased testing had helped the performance of their local schools, compared to 28 percent in 2007.
- 36 percent said the testing was hurting school performance; 41 percent said it had made no difference.

Education Next-PEPG Survey of Public Opinion, June 2013

<http://educationnext.org/reform-agenda-gains-strength/>

Survey administered by Knowledge Networks: June 2013

Participants: 1,138 adults

- Support for Common Core remains very high despite recent political controversy. Sixty-five percent of the public and 76% of teachers supported adopting the Common Core in their state,

but the percentage of those opposed has almost doubled from last year (7% in 2012, 13% in 2013). (Note: Some of this change may be due to changes in survey design.)

**Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research,
June/July 2013**

[www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Parent Attitudes/AP NORC Parents Attitudes on the Quality of Education in the US FINAL 2.pdf](http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Parent%20Attitudes/AP_NORC_Parents%20Attitudes%20on%20the%20Quality%20of%20Education%20in%20the%20US_FINAL_2.pdf)

Survey administered by NORC: June 21–July 22, 2013

Participants: 1,025 parents of children who completed grades K–12 in the last school year

- More than half of parents (52%) say they have heard only a little or nothing at all about the Common Core compared with 22% who have heard a moderate amount and 26% who have heard a lot or a great deal.
- Similarly, 34% of parents do not know if their state has implemented the Common Core or not. Forty-nine percent report that their state has implemented these standards, while 17% say their state has not.
- Just under half of parents (47%) think the Common Core will improve the quality of education. Eleven percent think the Common Core will decrease the quality of education, and 27% think they will have no effect.

PDK/Gallup: What Americans Said about Public Schools, May 2013

http://pdkintl.org/noindex/2013_PDKGallup.pdf

Survey administered by Gallup: May 7–31 2013

Participants: 1,001 adults

- 38% of Americans say they have heard of the Common Core; among Americans with children in public schools, 45% recognized the Core.
- 51% of those who said they have heard of the Common Core said they were “somewhat knowledgeable,” 15% reported they were “very knowledgeable,” and 28% were “not very knowledgeable.”
- Among the third who had heard of the Common Core, only 41% said the standards can help make education in the United States more competitive globally, 21% said the standards will make the United States less competitive, and 35% believe they will have no effect.
- Of those Americans who had heard of the Common Core, many said — erroneously — that the standards are based on a blending of state standards (49% rated this a 4 or 5 with 5 meaning “strongly agree” with this statement), that the federal government is insisting that all states adopt the standards (38%), and that there is a plan to create standards in all academic areas (30%).

EdWeek/Gallup, March/April 2013

www.edweek.org/ew/section/infographics/gallup-edweek-superintendents-survey.html

Survey administered by Gallup: March–April 2013

Participants: 12,000 district superintendents (not nationally representative, most serve districts with 200–500 students)

- More than half the superintendents — 58% — believe that the new Common Core State Standards adopted by most states will improve the quality of education in their communities; 75% say the shared standards will provide more consistency in educational quality from district to district and state to state. But 30% predict the standards will have no effect on schooling.
- 56% of superintendents say the Common Core will help make education in the United States more competitive globally; 33% say the standards will have no effect.
- Yet 100% of superintendents believe teachers in their district are already very or somewhat effective at providing a quality education; 96% believe their teachers are already very or somewhat effective at preparing their students for the world of work; and 95% believe their teachers are already very or somewhat effective at preparing students for citizenship.

Foundation for Excellence in Education/Chiefs for Change,

February/March 2013

<http://chiefsforchange.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Chiefs-for-Change-PreSurvey-Results-Key-Findings-Memo.pdf>

Survey administered by The Winston Group: February 21–March 2, 2013

Participants: 900 K–12 public school teachers (11 states: Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Tennessee)

- Nearly three in four teachers (73%) have a favorable view of the Common Core State Standards, and 74% support their state’s decision to adopt Common Core.
- Almost half (47%) of teachers say they have received “a lot of information” about Common Core, while another 37% say they have received “some information.” Only 14% of teachers said they had received “not very much” or “no information.”
- Most teachers are getting information about Common Core from their principal (85%) or their district (74%). Two in three (66%) say they have gotten information from a Common Core website, and 61% have gotten information from their state.
- Teachers prefer to learn about Common Core through in-person workshops (55%) and lesson planning materials (42%).
- Many teachers say they are “somewhat prepared” (49%) to teach what is expected in the Common Core, though only 37% say they are “very prepared.”

- 77% of teachers say they are already teaching to the new standards, while only 19% say they are not.
- Of the 77% of teachers who say they are already teaching to the new standards, about a third (34%) say that the new standards have changed the content they teach “quite a lot,” while 49% say things have changed “a little bit.”
- Teachers who have *not* yet begun teaching to Common Core expect that teaching to the new standards will change things, with 76% expecting it will change things “a lot” or “a little bit.”
- Most teachers (65%) think their state’s current academic standards are “about right,” and two-thirds (66%) think their state’s academic standards ensure students are college-ready upon graduation. (Seventy-seven percent of respondents say they are already teaching to Common Core.)
- Asked if they think the new standards will make students in their state more college ready, 46% say they think the standards will make students more prepared. Forty-one percent say there will be no difference, while only 7% think students will be less prepared.

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership, October/November 2012

www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf

Survey administered by Harris Interactive: October 5–November 11, 2012

Participants: 1,000 teachers; 500 principals

- Nine in 10 principals (90%) and teachers (93%) are confident or very confident that teachers in their schools already have the academic skills and abilities to implement the Common Core in their classrooms.
- 67% of principals and 59% of teachers rank implementing the Common Core standards as challenging or very challenging.
- 82% of principals and 69% of teachers are confident or very confident that the Common Core will improve student achievement.
- 81% of principals and 71% of teachers believe the Common Core will help better prepare students for college and the workforce.

6. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

You've been asked to do an interview with a reporter or media outlet. Great opportunity? Sure. But it's also one you want to be ready for.

Prepare

Practice: Before you do an interview with a reporter or editorial board, ask a friend or colleague to help you practice. Try to anticipate the questions you'll be asked and come up with the best answers. Write those down, and try to remember them. If the interview is by phone, you can keep those notes nearby. But try to avoid sounding like you're reading from cue cards.

Read Up: Read past stories by the journalist or journalists you are meeting to better understand the angles they cover. And consider the publication and its coverage history before you decide to participate.

Ask for Details: If journalists seek you out, it's okay to ask for details about what they are covering. Reporters usually won't send you questions ahead of time, but they should give you enough information to help you make a wise choice about participating and help you prepare.

Remember Key Guidelines

When speaking with reporters, it's always good to be cautious and think through what you say carefully. Here are the guidelines under which journalists generally interview sources:

On the Record. This means reporters can use whatever you say verbatim, with your name attached. It's often best to stick with this approach and simply choose your words with care.

On Background. They can use what you say but can't use your name. You might be described as a teacher or as someone who works in a school district. In this case, you should set clear ground rules regarding how you want to be identified or described.

Off the Record. You can give the reporter a tip or can provide context for a story, but the reporter will have to verify the information separately and can't in any way reveal that he or she learned the information from you. If you're going to say something off the record, remember to make it *very* clear that those are the conditions under which you're speaking before revealing the news you are sharing.

Get Your Points Across

There is a good chance you're doing an interview with a journalist because of your classroom experience and because you are part of a network of educators advocating for policies that you believe will improve our education system. If so, you'll want to get your views across in a strong and straightforward way. Remember to use anecdotes from your work with kids and bring the issues at hand to life in a real way. Don't use wonky language, but stick to the kind of conversational approach you might take with the parents of your students.

Develop Talking Points: The best way to get your views across is to write out a set of talking points, or key messages, you want to be sure to hit upon during the interview. Even if the journalists' questions don't seem to directly focus on the issues you want to address, there are usually ways to redirect the conversation. You don't want to come across as evasive, but do try to control the message by being engaging and looking for connections in the conversation that allow you to steer the interview toward the discussion you want to have and toward topics that you feel comfortable talking about.

Have Quotes Ready: A good quote goes a long way, so you might want to think of those ahead of time as long as they can be dropped into the conversation naturally. Try to remember to be yourself (though your cautious self), and try to enjoy getting to know the person sitting across from you. Reporters don't get into classrooms as often as they'd like, and establishing a source relationship with you should be important to them — especially if education is their beat.

For Broadcast Interviews

If your interview is with a television reporter, remember to look at the person interviewing you, not the camera. For both radio and television, try to speak clearly and succinctly and avoid the “ums,” “likes,” and “you knows” that sometimes creep into our language. Short, to-the-point answers are best.

Be Proactive with Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

You don't have to wait for a reporter's call to get your point of view in the local newspaper.

Letters to the Editor: You can submit letters to the editor when you see a story on a topic you care about. Keep your letters on point; make them engaging; keep them to about 150–200 words; and submit them immediately after the related article is published.

Op-Eds: An op-ed is an opinion piece on a newsy topic, and your goal should be to present your position on that topic in a clear and compelling way. You'll want to back up your opinion with anecdotal evidence, typically based on your experience, and empirical evidence, such as data from a research study. Try to write in a lively and personal manner that will draw readers in. Op-eds vary in length but generally run around 600 words. You should check with the paper in question to see if it offers guidelines. Try and submit the op-ed to an actual person rather than just a generic email, such as the editorial-page editor.

7. EXAMPLES OF EDUCATOR VOICES

Print

Following are examples of articles and op-eds from teachers who are speaking out to voice support for the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments.

Articles

“Six Ways the Common Core Is Good for Students”

NEA Today, Diane Long, May 10, 2013

<http://neatoday.org/2013/05/10/six-ways-the-common-core-is-good-for-students/>

A panel of educators describes the six top reasons they believe the Common Core is good for their students and for our education system.

“Why the ‘Common Core’ Matters” and “Myths and Realities Surrounding the Common Core”

Wyoming Star Tribune, Kaycee Eckhardt, April 13–14, 2013

http://trib.com/search/?l=50&sd=desc&s=start_time&f=html&byline=KAYCEE%20ECKHARDT

In this a two-part series, addressed to the citizens of Wyoming, Eckhardt uses a compelling mix of evidence and personal experience as a classroom teacher to bust myths and argue that the Common Core standards effectively address many of the problems facing our country’s education system.

Op-Eds

“A New Starting Line for My Students”

New York Daily News, Kalyca Thomas, August 7, 2013

www.nydailynews.com/opinion/new-starting-line-students-article-1.1419456

Thomas, a 6th grade teacher in New York City, makes the case for raising the bar on testing, even when facing lower test scores.

“Legislature Makes a Mistake on Common Core”

Detroit News, Concetta Lewis, June 11, 2013

www.detroitnews.com/article/20130611/OPINION01/306110007

Lewis, a teacher for 13 years in Detroit Public Schools and now a Ph.D. student and America Achieves Fellow, explains why the state legislature made a mistake by blocking implementation of the Common Core. She argues that teachers and students are already seeing the positive effects of the new standards in their classrooms, and she urges her community to continue supporting the work.

Social Media

Following are examples of blog posts and tweets written by teachers to voice support for the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments.

Blog Posts

“Testing Is Not the Enemy. Bad Testing Is.”

Huffington Post, Brian Denitzio and Carline Kelly, July 16, 2013

www.huffingtonpost.com/teach-plus/testing-is-not-the-enemy_b_3607015.html

Two Boston public school teachers make the case for annual testing — as long as the tests are worthwhile assessments that are developed with the input of educators and are continually evaluated and revised. Though this post doesn't directly speak about the CCSS, it makes some strong and relevant points about the value of assessment in general.

“A Georgia Teacher of the Year: Stay the Course with Common Core”

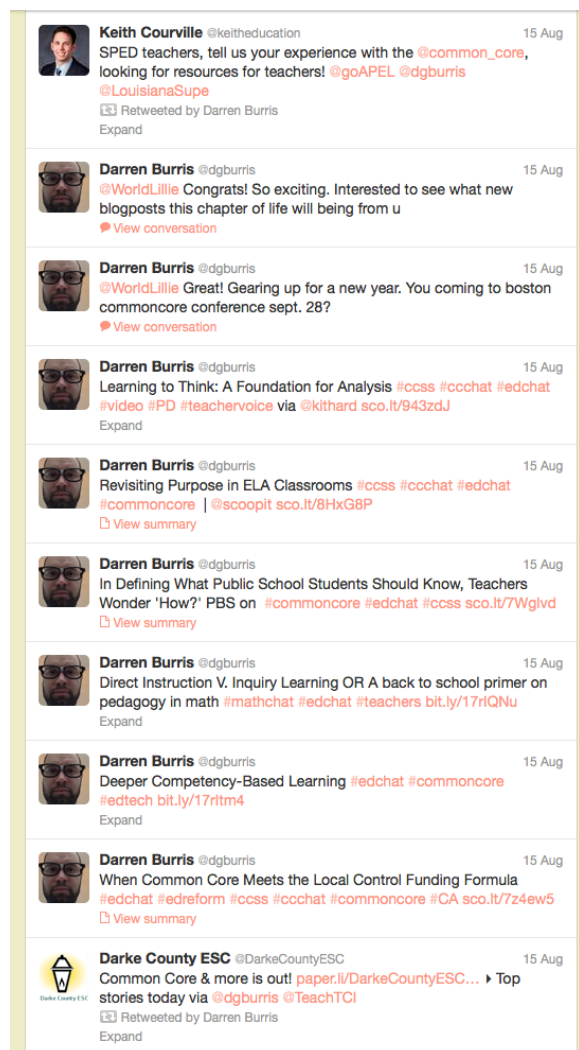
Get Schooled blog, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Pam Williams, June 27, 2013

www.ajc.com/weblogs/get-schooled/2013/jun/27/georgia-teacher-year-defends-common-core/

In a state where the Common Core faces significant opposition, Williams, a high school instructional support specialist, acknowledges growing pains associated with implementing the Common Core but makes the case for why the standards are worth it.

Tweets

Teachers such as Darren Burris (@dgburris) from Boston are using Twitter and other social media to make the case for the Common Core and correct misperceptions. Sample tweets from Burris:



Many additional examples are available on the ELC portal:
<http://parcc.nms.org>